Character Education as Prevention

A Focused Review of the Literature

WYSAC

Character Education as Prevention:

A Focused Review of the Literature

By

Brianna Chavez, M.A., Assistant Research Scientist

With the assistance of
Dr. Rodney Wambeam, Senior Research Scientist
Eric Canen, M.A., Center for Health and Education Studies Manager
Dr. Timothy Pearson, Assistant Research Scientist
Amy Rieser, B.A., Assistant Research Scientist

Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center
University of Wyoming • Dept. 3925
1000 East University Avenue • Laramie, WY 82071
wysac@uwyo.edu • http://wysac.uwyo.edu

(307) 766-2189 • Fax: (307) 766-2759

Under contract to the Wyoming Department of Health
Brandy Parnell, Prevention Specialist
6101 Yellowstone Rd., Suite 510
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-6541

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary

This report presents the Wyoming State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) with findings from a focused review of literature completed by the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC). The literature review includes overviews of relevant contextual histories of prevention work and character education in schools, provides detailed descriptions of character education programs, and discusses findings from the literature on the effectiveness of character education, particularly those that align with prevention strategies.

1.1 Features and Types of Character Education

Generally, the varieties of underlying character education perspectives can be characterized according to the goals and perspectives they prioritize, including
•instilling morality;
•teaching virtues;
•instilling collectivism; and
•teaching decision-making.

The existing literature suggests that most character education programs fall under the following implementation strategies:
•consensus building;
•cooperative learning;
•conflict resolution;
•discussing and engaging students in moral reasoning; and
•service-learning (Williams, 2000).

1.2 Character Education as Prevention

Prevention efforts aim to eliminate specific behaviors, attitudes, and cognitions thought to influence a broad range of problem behaviors. Although character education and prevention efforts are somewhat different in their origins, there exists a considerable amount of overlap in the goals they wish to achieve (Berkowitz, 2000). Generally, prevention and character education programs aim to develop resilient youth who have more positive life outcomes.

1.3 Does Character Education Work?

The body of character education research yields largely mixed results on the effectiveness of such programs. Despite mixed findings, the literature indicates character education begun in early childhood and continued through early elementary grades is the most impactful at creating lasting change in positive youth outcomes. Moreover, the body of evidence suggests that character education programs may impact disadvantaged youth more than youth from middle and upper-class backgrounds. Evidence suggests that All Stars

(Harrington et al., 2001) Nurse-Family Partnership (Eckenrode et al., 2010; Kitzman, 2010; Olds, 2007), Al's Pals (Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004), Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (Riggs et al., 2006), the RULER approach (Rivers et al., 2013), the Knowledge is Power Program (Tuttle et al., 2013), and service-learning programs (Billig, 2002, McNamara, 2000, Scales, et al., 2000) are the most effective character education programs when implemented with fidelity.

1.4 Evidence-Based Program Features

The evidence base suggests the most successful character education programs have some or all of the following features
* quality of implementation;
* student-school bonding;
* trained leadership;
* comprehensive character/prevention/academic education;
* staff development;
* parent involvement;
* student reflection; and
* role models.

1.5 Discussion

The most recent reviews of character education literature recommend schools and communities implement evidence-based character education programs during early childhood, target programs toward disadvantaged youth, and adequately train those implementing programs to improve outcomes through program fidelity.

2. Introduction

This report presents the Wyoming State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) with findings from a focused review of literature completed by the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC). The literature review includes overviews of relevant contextual histories of prevention work and character education in schools, provides detailed descriptions of character education programs, and discusses findings from the literature on the effectiveness of character education, particularly those which align with prevention strategies.

2.1 Purpose of the SEOW

The SEOW is a program of the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) directed by the WDH Public Health Division (PHD). It is comprised of representatives from
- Wyoming Department of Health;
- Wyoming Department of Education;
- Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation;
- Wyoming Department of Family Services;
- Wyoming Board of Pharmacy;
- Tribal services from the Arapaho and Shoshoni Tribes;
- community prevention providers; and
- researchers from the University of Wyoming, WYSAC.

The SEOW's charter is to provide guidance and information regarding the available data associated with substance abuse and mental health issues throughout the state. In particular, the SEOW is responsible for gathering, reporting, and disseminating information regarding substance abuse and mental health data in Wyoming. It also serves as a decision-making body regarding the deliverables for the SEOW grant. The SEOW helps determine directions to pursue, review results, and make recommendations.

Its support comes from the WDH and a grant from the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
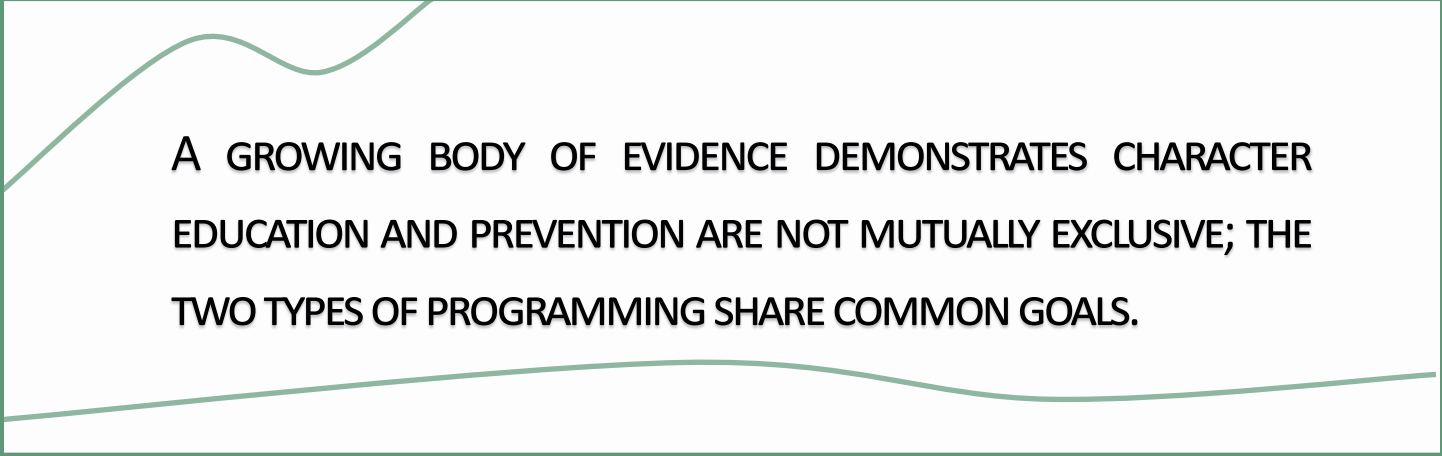
In performance of its duty as the data body recommending best-practices in substance abuse prevention in the State of Wyoming, the SEOW determined that Character Education is worth exploring as an option for evidence-based prevention.

2.2 Organization of the Report

This document contains eight sections. Sections 1 and 2 provide an executive summary and an introduction, respectively. Section 3 provides an overview of the features and types of character education. Section 4 describes character education as prevention. Section 5 describes character education programs that have been implemented over the course of the last 30 years, as well as key findings from the literature regarding the effectiveness of character education programs. Section 6 presents key findings from the literature regarding the features of evidence-based character education programs. Section 7 summarizes key features of effective evidence-based character education programs. Section 8 draws conclusions on the evidence base for character education programs based on the body of literature. Section 8 contains citations for reference material used in this report.

"CHARACTER EDUCATION IS WORTH EXPLORING AS AN OPTION FOR EVIDENCE-BASED PREVENTION."

A GROWING BODY OF EVIDENCE DEMONSTRATES CHARACTER EDUCATION AND PREVENTION ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE; THE TWO TYPES OF PROGRAMMING SHARE COMMON GOALS.

2.3 Character Education: Historical Context

Fraught with the mass influx of immigrants, the Great Depression, and war, the early 20th Century education system in the United States experienced the first widespread and formalized shift towards values integration. In addition to honing academic skills, schools in the 20th Century began to take on the role of shaping the morality, virtue, and citizenship of students. In 1937 New York State became the first state to formally introduce a character building curriculum into its school systems. The curriculum emphasized the responsibility of the school system in creating moral citizens (Watz, 2011). In the following decades, moral and character education was generally woven through other curricula, but was not practiced in schools as an autonomous programmatic curriculum until the early 1990's (Watz, 2011).

From the 1960's through the 1980's, numbers of private parochial and religious-based schools throughout the United States grew as a reaction to perceived value deficiencies characterized by increases in drug use, violence, worsening test scores, increases in teen pregnancy, and racial turmoil during the height of the Civil Rights Movement (Reese, 2007; Watz, 2011). Private school curricula emphasized the importance of the schools in inculcating children with the beliefs, values, and ideologies they deemed necessary to create a moral society (Reese, 2007).

By the 1990's growing media attention toward violence in schools prompted educators to revisit the role of the public schools in character education. In 1992, a diverse group of education reform activists convened at a summit hosted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Aspen, Colorado to initiate the Character Counts! Coalition. The Coalition suggested that trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (the six pillars) were fundamental character traits that should be

fostered by school systems and communities. In the following year, the national Character Education Partnership was established. The Character Education Partnership went on to produce a handbook detailing the eleven principles of importance in character development, alongside a best-practice guide for implementing the eleven principles in schools (Soujourner, 2012).

The early 1990's also gave rise to a multi-disciplinary prevention science movement aimed at identifying risk and protective factors thought to contribute to problem behaviors such as substance abuse, aggression, early onset sexual behaviors, suicide, and poor nutrition (Berkowitz, 2000; Coie et al., 1993). School systems across the country began to implement various programs designed with prevention in mind. By the early 2000's, the evidence base for prevention programming provided justification for school systems to prioritize prevention programs over character education programs. Over the last decade, a growing body of evidence has demonstrated that character education and prevention are not mutually exclusive program types. Rather, the two types of programming share common goals. As such, the literature suggests a comprehensive approach that addresses both simultaneously is the best-practice for K-12 programming (Berkowitz, 2000; Lewis et al., 2012, Ruby & Doolittle, 2010; Sojourner, 2012).

3. Features and Types of Character Education

3.1 Perspectives and Roles

To facilitate summarizing character education programs, we provide a brief review of the perspectives from which they are derived and the roles of character education as viewed through the lens of those perspectives. Although there exists a large body of literature synthesizing the varieties of perspectives underlying character education, there is a great deal of overlap among the perspectives. Thus, we review the themes as they are generally categorized in the body of literature. Generally, the varieties of underlying character education perspectives can be characterized according to the goals the perspectives prioritize.

3.1.1 Instilling Morality

Some advocates of education reform assert the purpose of character education is to teach children how to engage in moral reasoning, while others insist that moral character is created out of habit - that moral actions must become routine to be sustained (Williams, 2000; Watz, 2011; Schaps & Williams, 1999). Regardless of the pedagogical orientation, both aim to build positive and long-lasting character foundations.

3.1.2 Virtues

Although there is a great deal of semantic variation in defining character education, the character education movement of the 1990's was instrumental in defining the foundation of character education as practiced today. Initial attempts at defining character education in the 1990's were based upon a broad variety of educational approaches, often in conjunction with parents and community members, that attempted to teach children to become caring, principled, and responsible (Berkowitz, 2000; Sojourner, 2012; Tough, 2012; Williams, 2000). In contrast, the Character Counts! Coalition formed in the early 1990's to promote character education in schools, were based upon the six pillars of character essential to the development of virtuous children (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship). Over time other child development experts modified and/ or incorporated these pillars into their own conceptions of character education (Tough, 2012; Yeager, Fisher & Shearon, 2011).

3.1.3 Collectivism

In the early 2000's, in the midst of increasing attention to violence and bullying in schools as a result of the Columbine shooting, child development experts and preventionists called upon schools to implement character-building activities in school curricula. From the perspective of school reformers and character education advocates, school violence, bullying, and other unsavory behaviors among young people were reflections of the lack of a collectivist-community concern for others and the absence of taught virtues that may not be acquired if not acquired in school (Kagan, 2001). In more recent years, child development scholars have expressed concern that the culture of today's youth is becoming increasingly self-interested and lacking in character. They argue schools need to do more to develop the character of student than they do to create an achievement-oriented environment (Levine, 2012; Weissbourd, 2009; Sojourner, 2012).

3.1.4 Decision-Making

Several proponents of character education programs explain that the basis for teaching morality and building character in schools is to promote responsible decision-making. Poor decision-making, they argue, impacts emotion identification, goal-setting, interpersonal skills, and pro-social behaviors, all of which contribute to a wide range of problem behaviors (Lickona, 1993; Greenberg et al., 2003; NCER, 2011).

INSTILLING MORALITY   VIRTUES   COLLECTIVISM   DECISION-MAKING

3.2 Character Education Strategies

Just as there exist differences in theoretical perspectives informing various approaches to character education, proponents of character education have variations in strategies for teaching character education. In her synthesis of character education models, Mary Williams identifies a few types of character education strategies under which most character education programs fall:

Cooperative Learning   Conflict Resolution   Service-Learning   Moral Reasoning

3.2.1 Cooperative Learning

Some advocates of character education programs suggest that building positive foundations for youth may do more to impact targeted behaviors and predictor behaviors than intervening once undesirable behaviors have occurred. To that end, some advocates for school reform suggest that experiential learning, such as cooperative learning which engages students in working as an effective team member, should be used to provide such a foundation (William, 2000; Sojourner, 2012).

3.2.3 Moral Reasoning

Character development scholars advise that engaging students in moral reasoning improves the school environment and promotes positive decision-making among students. Engaging students in moral reasoning can take many forms, but typically involves emphasis on activities which promote pillar virtues like respect, trustworthiness, caring and civic-mindedness (Williams, 2000).

3.2.2 Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution curricula typically include interpersonal communication building, anger management, empathy, development and relationship building. The literature indicates that conflict resolution skills provide protective foundations for students to resist peer pressure and make healthy choices, thus decreasing the likelihood that students will engage in substance use and other problem behaviors. For this reason, several character education programs have conflict resolution components (NCER, 2011).

3.2.4 Service-Learning

Service-learning is a teaching method characterized by applied curriculum content through community engagement. Character education advocates recommend incorporating service-learning into curricula as a means for fostering civic-mindedness, teaching community-building and leadership, and enhancing learning through active engagement (McNamara, 2000; Williams, 2000).

4. Character Education as Prevention

Just as theoretical perspectives and strategies for character education vary, so too do justifications for prevention efforts. Prevention efforts aim to eliminate specific behaviors and attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors thought to influence a broad range of problem behaviors. Although character education and prevention efforts are somewhat different in their origins, there exists a considerable amount of overlap in the goals they wish to achieve (Berkowitz, 2000).

4.1 Building Resilient Youth

Despite the varying forms of character education, they generally aim to develop productive, ethical, and healthy youth through the development of morals and virtues that lead to positive decision-making and forging of positive interpersonal relationships and community-connectedness. The goals of most prevention efforts are similar—to prevent specific behaviors, substance abuse or broader factors thought to contribute to those behaviors through reduction of risk factors and development of protective factors (Berkowitz, 2000; Coie et al., 1993; Hawkins et. al., 1992). Several risk factors identified as problem behaviors and attitudes such as anti-social attitudes, aggression, self-absorption, and low religiosity are also factors which some character education programs seek to shape.

The reduction of risk factors and development of protective factors are thought to cultivate resilient youth (Brooks, 2006; Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004; Heckman & Kautz, 2013). Practitioners and academics over the last couple of decades have recommended schools as an appropriate venue for cultivating resilient youth through character education because of the sheer numbers of children served by schools and the amount of time children spend daily in schools, making them well suited to serve as "agents of developmental change" (Brooks, 2006; Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004). In a multi-year, multi-state evaluation of a resilience-based prevention program for preschool and early elementary-school children, researchers found the program increased social-emotional competence and positive coping skills and effectively reduced anti-social and aggressive behaviors (Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004).

Berkowitz (2000) suggests that findings from studies on the Child Development Project, a comprehensive character education and prevention program, demonstrate the utility of character education programs at effectively addressing the most predictors of problem thoughts and behaviors.
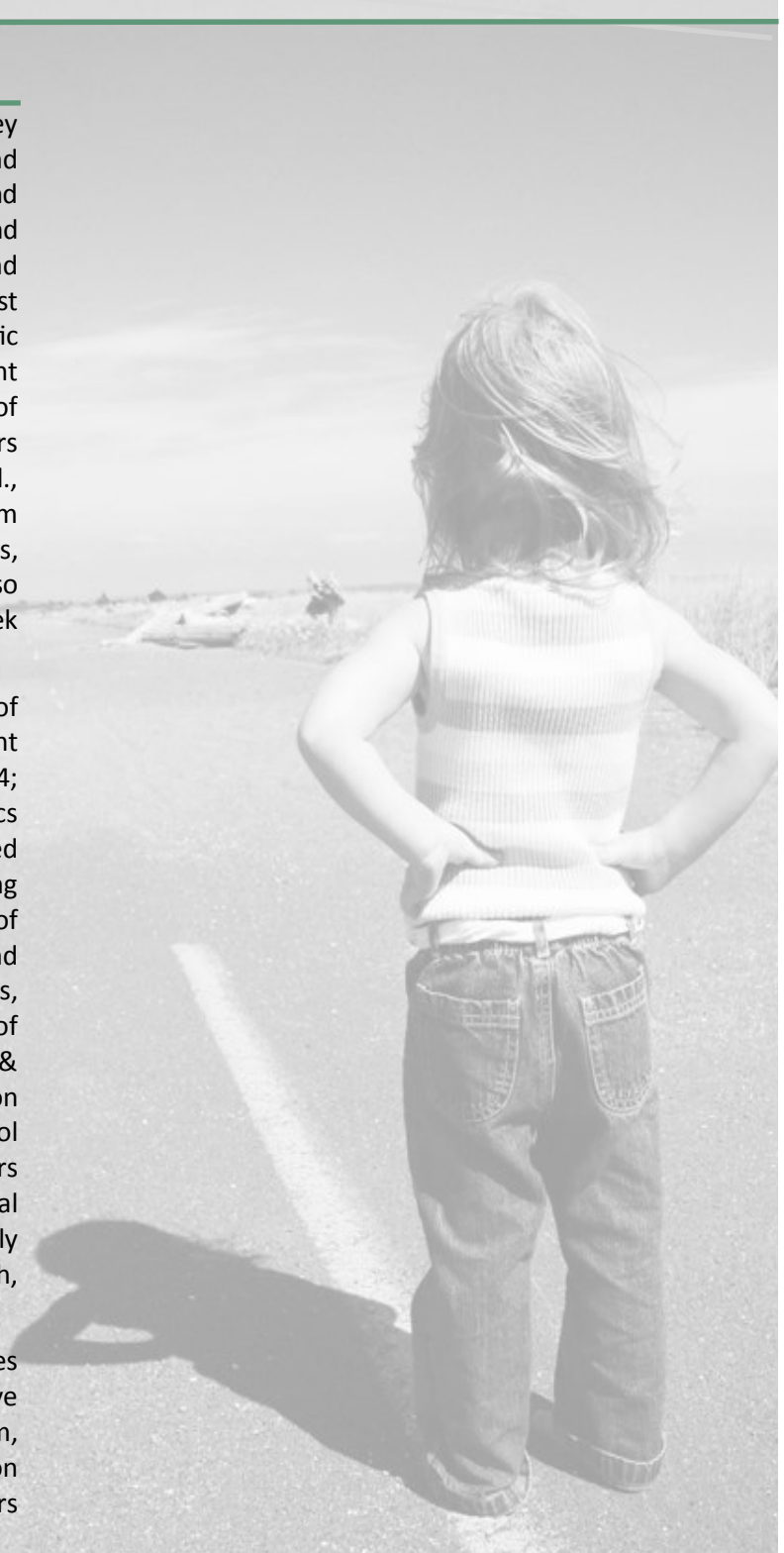
5. Does Character Education Work?

Although character education programs contain a myriad of implementation elements, a growing body of evidence demonstrates support for some programs over others. In this section we present effective evidence-based programs and programs with promising practices. Evidence-based programs are those which have been substantially studied through methodologically rigorous studies; programs with promising practices are those which evidence suggests may be effective but do not yet have a substantial methodologically rigorous research base.

5.1 National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP)

The National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices is the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) online repository of independently assessed and scored prevention interventions. Intervention developers nominate their programs to be reviewed on a voluntary basis. Thus, the list of reviewed interventions is not exhaustive. Interventions are reviewed based upon the quality of available research. Each intervention is assigned a score on a three-point 0 to 4 scale (0,2,4) on the basis of six factors:

- Reliability of measures;
- Validity of measures;
- Intervention fidelity;
- Missing data and attrition; and
- Potentially confounding variables,
- Appropriateness of analysis (NREPP, 2013).

Because interventions are scored according to particular studies included in their analyses, not all relevant outcomes are included in the assessment. For instance, NREPP evaluated the Nurse-Family Partnership on the level of evidence to support the following five outcomes using literature from 1986 to 2004:

- Maternal prenatal health;
- Childhood injuries and maltreatment;
- Number of subsequent pregnancies and birth intervals;
- Maternal self-sufficiency; and
- Child school readiness.

These outcomes are not relevant to the present review; thus, the NREPP score cannot be used. In instances where outcomes were assessed in the NREPP but are not relevant to character education measures, the outcomes are greyed out (See Table 2). Instead, more current literature has been able to speak to the effectiveness of the program at reducing internalizing and externalizing disorders and reducing substance use and was used to determine the level of empirical support for relevant programmatic outcomes.

Table 1. Summary of Evidence Base for Character Education Programs

Program Title	Setting	Ages/Grades	Target Population	NREPP Score	Evidence
All Stars	School	Ages 6-12, 13-17	N/A	2.2	Mixed evidence
Al's Pals	School	0-5, 6-12	N/A	3.0	Effective
Child Development Project		K-age 6	N/A		
Knowledge is Power	School	PreK-12	Low socioeconomic status & minority students	N/A	Not effective
Nurse-Family Partnership	Home	Ages 0-5		3.4*	Effective
Positive Action	School	Ages 6-12	Low socioeconomic status	2.4	Mixed evidence
PATHS	School	0-5	Young children	3.2	Mixed evidence
RULER	School	K-8th grade		N/A	Mixed evidence
Service-learning	School	K-12th grade		N/A	Mixed evidence

Note: * Indicates that the program was evaluated by NREPP, but outcomes assessed are not related to character education outcomes.

5.2 Infant and Early Childhood Programs

Whereas some types of character education aim to prevent or reduce specific behaviors (i.e. bullying, substance use), or promote specific sets of values and behaviors (i.e. positive conflict resolution, civic-mindedness, integrity), comprehensive programs implement integrated designs with multi-faceted curricula (prevention of particular behaviors in addition to developing positive attitudes, behaviors, emotions, cognitions, and relationships) (Berkowitz, 2000) and often contain a parental involvement component (Hawkins et. al, 1992).

5.2.1 Nurse-Family Partnership

The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) is a home visitation program whereby child health nurses visit homes of first-time mothers from pregnancy until the child reaches age two. Goals of the program are to empower mothers and improve child development outcomes. The NFP program has been widely evaluated on a number of mother-centered and child-centered outcomes. For the purposes of this paper we present only those outcomes related to substance use, anti-social behaviors, and internalizing/externalizing disorders as they relate to risk factors. Results from several randomized control trials indicate the Nurse-Family Partnership is effective at reducing internalizing disorders over the long term (Olds, 2004), externalizing disorders (Olds, 2004), 30-day substance use (Kitzman, 2010), illicit drug use (Eckenrode et al., 2010), and anti-social behaviors (Olds, 2007). Results from the research indicate the program works by improving character skills.

5.2.2 Al's Pals

The Al's Pals program is an early childhood prevention program designed to increase social-emotional protective factors and decrease anti-social behaviors during the course of the school year. To ensure fidelity to the program model, the curriculum is only implemented by teachers authorized and trained to administer the curriculum. Multi-year evaluations of the program indicate children exhibited better self-regulation than their comparative counterparts (the control group). Furthermore, children in the Al's Pals program exhibited fewer problem behaviors over the course of the program than their non-participant counterparts. Although the studies on Al's Pals collected data through teacher reports, repeated evaluations of the program using experimental study designs suggest the program effectively achieves its goals of developing resilient children (Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004).

Table 2. NREPP Outcomes Scores for the Nurse-Family Partnership Program

Outcome measure	Score	Description
Maternal prenatal health	3.5	Outcome is measured by smoking habits, preeclampsia, and toxemia through medical records.
Child maltreatment	3.5	Outcome is measured using information from state-level protective service records, hospital records, physician records, and results from a parenting inventory.
Pregnancy frequency	3.3	Outcome is a self-report measure of the number and intervals of child births.
Maternal self-sufficiency	3.2	Outcome is measured by the number of months mother has been receiving state/local/federal aid.
School readiness	3.4	Outcome is measured using standardized cognitive and language assessments from children at 21 months old.

NREPP scores for the Nurse-Family Partnership were not used in the determination of the level of empirical support for the Nurse-

Table 3. NREPP Outcomes Scores for the Al's Pals Program

Outcome measure	Score	Description
Pro-social behaviors	2.9	Outcome was measured using the Child Behavior Scale, the Preschool and the Kindergarten Behavior Scale.
Antisocial/aggressive behaviors	3.0	Outcome was measured using the Child Behavior Scale, the Preschool and the Kindergarten Behavior Scale.

As demonstrated in Table 3, Al's Pals received a 3.0 in the NREPP on impacts on reducing antisocial behaviors and a 2.9 on improving pro-social behaviors. As of 2004, Al's Pals had been implemented in more than 4,000 early childhood classrooms and 700 elementary schools nationwide. The program enjoys significant empirical support for improving the specified primary prevention outcomes (NREPP, 2013).

5.3 Social-Emotional Development Programs

Social-emotional learning (SEL) character education programs are those that use coordinated efforts to promote positive social and emotional development and foster protective mechanisms. Such programs address a wide age-range of children from kindergarten through high-school. Ideal program implementation follows the SAFE model (Sequential, Active, Focused, and Explicit). In addition, implementation of SEL programs follows two sets of coordinated efforts, the first includes instruction on processing, integrating, and selectively applying social and emotional skills in a variety of contexts. The second provides students with opportunities to contribute to their school, classroom, and community (Durlak et al., 2011; Reyes et al., 2012). In a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs nationwide, Durlak et al. (2011) found that SEL programs significantly improved attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance of students compared to control groups.

Another meta-analysis of 28 peer reviewed studies looking at classroom-based interventions promoting social responsibility, positive social relationships and self-regulation found that such programs are effective at increasing social skills, but the effects were small. Further, the study found that the most impacts were seen among preschool and kindergarten students, as opposed to older elementary and secondary children (January, Casey & Paulson, 2011).

5.3.1 Positive Action

Positive Action is a heavily studied program implemented in elementary schools designed to decrease problem behaviors and promote positive behaviors by developing positive self-esteem and positive behavioral reinforcement (Allred, n.d.). The program consists of the activities to address the following six units:
* Self-concept;
* Positive actions for the body and mind;
* Managing one's self responsibly;
* The golden rule;
* Being truthful to one's self; and
* Continuous self-improvement.

Results from randomized trials in 42 schools indicate Positive Action has a mediated effect; that students participating in the Positive Action program experienced increased thoughts and feelings thought to be related to substance use compared to children in the control groups. In addition, children who did not participate in the program engaged in positive behaviors at a lower rate over time than the cohort of children participating in Positive Action. Furthermore, evidence from multiple studies suggest the Positive Action program is most effective when implemented among younger children (kindergarten or preschool-aged children) and among children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Lewis, 2012; Li, 2011; Washburn et al., 2011).

Table 4. NREPP Outcomes Scores for the Positive Action Program

Outcome measure	Score	Description
Problem behaviors	2.4	The outcome was measured using self-reported substance use, violence, and sexual behaviors.
Academic achievement	2.8	The outcome was measured using state-level standardized test scores.
School absenteeism	2.5	The outcome was measured using average daily absences, number of students absent during the school year, and the number of days absent from school administrative records.
Family functioning	2.2	The outcome was measured using self-reports of family conflict, family cohesion, and parent-child bonding.

Positive Action scored a 2.4 on NREPP for the level of evidence to support the effectiveness of the program at reducing problem behaviors such as alcohol and drug use, sexual behaviors, and aggression. The primary strength of research on Positive Action listed on NREPP is the level of rigor with which control groups were selected; the primary weakness presented was that not all children studied were randomly assigned to interventions (NREPP, 2013).

5.3.2 Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Program

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) is a school-based program designed to encourage social and emotional thinking among elementary school students. Findings from multiple studies using control groups and/or regression analyses suggest the PATH program effectively promotes inhibitory controls, verbal fluency, and, to a lesser extent, targeted behavioral outcomes. Implications from the findings suggest the program is most effective when implemented among younger children with developmentally appropriate curriculum (Curtis & Norgate, 2007; Lewis, et al., 2012; Riggs et al., 2006).

5.3.3 The RULER Approach

The RULER Approach was developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to create effective and caring communities of individuals engaging in positive decision-making, creativity, and positive health and relationship choices by teaching children how to develop their emotional intelligence (YCEI, 2013). The RULER Approach consists of the following three phases

- Phase 1: Anchors of Emotional Intelligence (Teacher Training);
- Phase 2: Feeling Words Curriculum (Integration of RULER into curriculum); and
- Phase 3: Lasting Results (Integrating other faculty, staff, and administrators and ongoing Technical Assistance).

Results from randomized control trials of 64 schools (32 were control schools) suggest student outcomes for emotional literacy, social problem solving, and social competence were impacted the greatest when implemented by teachers who received more training and taught more lessons and when teachers who were classified as high-quality program implementers (Reyes, et al., 2012). Evidence from a different study using multi-level modeling analyses found students who participated in RULER schools had higher levels of warmth and connectedness between students and teachers had greater autonomy (Rivers, et al., 2013).

5.3.4 Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP)

The Knowledge is Power Program was developed for middle school students to improve achievement and build character among low income students. Although the program boasts improved academic outcomes, critics note studies did not control for baseline achievement. Randomized trials of the program found KIPP improved academic outcomes compared to control groups, but character skills were not improved (Tuttle, et al., 2013).

Table 5. NREPP Outcomes Scores for the PATHS Program

Outcome measure	Score	Description
Emotional knowledge	2.5	The outcome was measured using ability to discuss one's emotional experiences, cues to recognize emotions, simultaneity of emotions, display rules for emotions, and how emotions change were assessed using various interviewer instruments.
Internalizing behaviors	2.9	Teachers and peers were asked to assess students on social withdrawal and anxiety using the Child Behavior Checklist
Externalizing behaviors	2.9	Teachers and peers were asked to assess students on aggression and disruptive behaviors using the Child Behavior Checklist.
Neurocognitive capacity	2.8	The outcome was measured by the Stroop test that collected information about inhibitory control and neurocognitive capabilities.
Learning environment	2.6	Information about classroom disruption, appropriate expression of feelings, following rules, classroom transitions, enthusiasm, focus, responsiveness to needs, and criticism and supportiveness were assess by unbiased observers using the Classroom Rating Form.
Social-emotional competence	2.8	The outcome was measured using parent and teacher reports on social cooperation, social interaction, and social independence.
Depression	3.2	The outcome was measured using self-reports from the Children's Depression Index.

The NREPP assessment of the PATHS program indicates that the program is supported by a significant body of empirical evidence. A notable weakness of the studies evaluating the program is the lack in sufficiently assessing the validity of some of the

5.4 Service-Learning Programs

Service-learning programs are school-based curricula where students engage in service projects to address community needs. They typically involve students in planning, execution and reflection, and strive to build character (Billig, 2002). Such programs are thought to reduce risky behaviors by promoting socially responsible decision-making, civic-mindedness, engaging students in reflective activities, and increasing self-esteem. Literature on the effectiveness of service-learning programs reveals mixed findings and focuses primarily on older youth and college students. One study of 29 middle schools implementing service-learning programs found students who participated in service-learning programs expressed greater concern for others and talked about school with their parents more frequently compared to the control group (Scales, et al., 2000). The extent to which these factors are considered protective factors is unknown. In another study of disengaged 9th graders in four schools using a pre-test post-test design, researchers found students who participated in the service-learning program demonstrated marked attendance improvements and improved GPA's. In addition, students who participated in the service learning program demonstrated improved scores on a classroom behavior self-esteem scale from pre- to post-test (McNamara, 2000).

5.5 Comprehensive Programs

Comprehensive programs implement integrated designs with multi-faceted curricula (prevention of particular behaviors in addition to developing positive attitudes, behaviors, emotions, cognitions, and relationships) (Berkowitz, 2000). Comprehensive programs also typically emphasize the role of parental involvement in continued commitment to developing responsible youth (Hawkins, et. al 1992). Generally, comprehensive character education programs closely mirror generalized prevention programs, and in many instances, there is a great deal of overlap between prevention programs and "character education" programs.

5.5.1 Child Development Project

The Child Development Project (CDP) is a comprehensive character education program with comprehensive implementation elements aimed at promoting positive development and resilience to high risk attitudes and behaviors among children in kindergarten through age 6. The program seeks to build supportive relationships, address social and ethical elements of learning, engage students in learning, and honor intrinsic motivation. Ideal program implementation includes literature-based reading curriculum, developmental discipline in the classroom, non-competitive school-wide activities, and family-involvement activities.

Results from assessments from a study with a quasi-experimental design found that when schools implemented the CDP comprehensively, there were statistically significant reductions in student's use of marijuana and alcohol (Battisch et al., 2000). Berkowitz (2000) describes the CDP as, "the most highly respected and effectively studied character education program." Although the program has not been reviewed in NREPP, there is sufficient evidence to suggest the program is an effective program at reducing youth substance use through a comprehensive character education.

5.5.2 All Stars

All Stars is a character education and problem behavior prevention program that aims to reduce substance use and develop character by fostering healthy relationships, building self-sufficiency, and developing commitment to community-service. The program is administered to students ages 11-18 by teachers and staff who have been trained in the All Stars Curriculum. The program interventions target evidence-based predictors of substance abuse such as: normative beliefs; lifestyle incongruence (perception that drug use, sexual activity and violence will interfere with desired lifestyle); commitment to remaining drug-free; and school bonding. (All Stars Project Inc., 2011; McNeal et al., 2004).

Research on the effectiveness of the program at reaching its intended goals is mixed. A longitudinal randomized evaluation of the All Stars program found that when the program was administered by trained teachers, the program reduced drug use and sexual behaviors and increased positive norms in in the short term, but effects were not sustained at the one year follow-up (Harrington et al., 2001). Other experimental studies suggest that the All Stars program is most effective at improving normative beliefs, lifestyle incongruence, commitment to not using substances, and social bonding, as opposed to reducing targeted behaviors such as substance abuse (McNeal, 2004; Harrington, 2001).

Table 6. NREPP Outcomes Scores for the All Stars Program

Outcome measure	Score	Description
Personal commitment to not use drugs	2.2	This outcome was measured using questions from a survey regarding personal views about substance use.
Lifestyle incongruence	2.2	This outcome was measured using questions from a survey regarding beliefs about substance use and desired lifestyles.
School bonding	2.2	This outcome was measured using questions from a survey about school.
Normative beliefs	2.2	This outcome was measured using questions from a survey questions about perceptions of the prevalence of substance use.
Cigarette, alcohol, and inhalant use	2.2	This outcome was measured using questions from a survey question about lifetime, 30-day and frequency of cigarette, alcohol, and inhalant use.

The NREPP listing of All Stars scores the program at a 2.2 on personal commitment not to use drugs, lifestyle incongruence, school bonding, normative beliefs, and substance use. SAMHSA noted that a challenge of the program is the confounding variables that weaken interpretation of study findings, but that longitudinal studies with large sample sizes give credibility to the study as a promising practice (NREPP, 2013).

6. Evidence-Based Program Features

Although the literature to date on character education programs covers a vast array of programmatic features, and has yielded largely mixed results, the evidence base suggests a number of best-practices for implementing effective character education programs. Below we present three commonly suggested recommendations for best practices in character education.

6.1 Focus on Early Childhood Development

A sizeable amount of research suggests that prevention efforts targeting children in early stages of development are most effective, as they are carried out during the developmentally formidable years that provide a foundation for behavioral and health-related domains (Heckman & Kautz, 2013; Lynch, Gellner & Schmidt, 2004). Best practice recommendations from the literature indicate programs for below school-aged children, kindergarten, and early elementary school children are most effective at primary and secondary prevention, compared to programs geared toward middle- and high school-aged youth.

6.2 Targeted Populations

Evidence from the existing literature suggests targeting specific populations with character education programs may be particularly effective at reducing risky behaviors (Heckman & Kautz, 2013). Although children from all backgrounds can benefit from character education, the research suggests the effect may be most pronounced among low income children (Heckman & Kautz, 2013; Cunha et al., 2010).

Research literature further suggests character education programming such as service learning may be most effective when targeting disengaged youth. Disengaged youth are those who are socially marginalized as a result of poor self-regulation and social competencies. Character education programs are thought to be effective at improving social and academic performance and reducing problem behaviors such as substance use, dropping out, and delinquency (McNamara, 2000).

6.3 Quality Implementation

Thus, Berkowitz and Bier (2004) examined the literature on evidence-based programs and concluded (and several studies concur) that the most effective programs at improving social behavioral, and attitudinal outcomes of youth have the following quality characteristics in common:

- quality of implementation (Reyes et al., 2012);
- student-school bonding (McNamara, 2000);
- trained leadership (Reyes et al., 2012);
- comprehensive character/prevention/academic education (Berkowitz, 2000);
- staff development;
- parent involvement (Heckman & Kautz, 2013);
- student reflection; and
- and adults as role models (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).

BEST-PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT   TARGETED POPULATIONS   QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION

7. Discussion

Child development experts found that character can be shaped early in life and that doing so can meaningfully influence children's decision-making and behavioral patterns.

Character education advocates and child development scholars recommend the following three strategies: 1) schools and communities should ideally implement character education programs during early childhood, 2) target programs toward economically disadvantaged youth, and 3) adequately train those implementing programs to improve outcomes through program fidelity.

Although there is a growing body of empirical support to suggest character education programs improve student outcomes, the evidence on sustained outcomes is mixed. However, several studies examined found that although some programs did not see improvement in all the intended outcomes, they could be considered promising practices. More methodologically rigorous studies would improve the evidence base for character eduction.

In addition, the methodological rigor necessary to draw more definitive conclusions on the effectiveness of particular character education programs is somewhat lacking. Key gaps in existing literature include:

- Lack of longitudinal data (Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004);
- Lack of follow-ups beyond 6 months (Heckman & Kautz, 2013);
- Bias in data reporting (Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004; NCER, 2011);
- Small sample sizes (NCER, 2011); and
- Operational definitions of some outcome measures are problematic (Tuttle, 2013).

Despite lacking methodologically rigorous evidence to support character education programs as a whole, there is enough evidence to suggest that specific programs such as the Nurse Family Partnership, Al's Pals, and All Stars can be effective at primary prevention.

8. References

All Stars Project, Inc. (2011). Retrieved from All Stars Project, Inc: Who we are: http://www.allstars.org/who-we-are

Allred, C. (n.d.). Retrieved from Positive Action: www.positiveaction.net

Battistich, V., Schaps, E., Watson, M., Solomon, D., & Lewis, C. (2000). Effects of the child development project on students' drug use and other problem behaviors. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 21*(1), 75-99.

Berkowitz, M. W. (2000). Character education as prevention. In W. B. Hansen, S. M. Giles, & M. D. Fearnow-Kenney, *Improving prevention effectiveness* (pp. 37-45). Greensboro, NC: Tanglewood Research.

Berkowitz, M. W., & Bier, M. C. (2004). Research-based character education. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 591*, 72-85.

Billig, S. H. (2002). Support for K-12 service-learning practice: A brief review of the research. *Educational Horizons, 80*(4), 184-189.

Brooks, J. E. (2006). Strengthening resilience in children and youths: Maximizing opportunities through the schools. *Children & Schools, 28*(2), 70-76.

Coie, C., Watt, N. F., West, S. G., Hawkins, J. D., Asarnow, J. R., Markham, H. J., . . . Long, B. (1993). The science of prevention: A conceptual framework and some directions for a national research program. *American Psychologist, 48*(10), 1013-1022.

Cunha, F., Heckman, J., & Schnnach, S. M. (2010). Estimating the technology of cognitive and noncognitive skill formation. *Econometrica, 78*(3), 883-931.

Curtis, C., & Norgate, R. (2007). An evaluation of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies curriculum at key stage 1. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 23*(1), 33-44.

Durlak, J. A., Weissburg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enchancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405-432.

Eckenrode, J., Campa, M., Luckey, D. W., Henderson, C. R., Cole, R., Kitzman, H., . . . Olds, D. L. (2010). Long-term effects of prenatal and infancy nurse home visitation on the life course of youths: 19-year follow-up of a randomized trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 164*(1), 9-15.

Gertler, P., Heckman, R., Pinto, A., Zanolini, C., Vermeersch, S., Walker, S., . . . Grantham-McGregor, S. (1991). *Labor market returns to early childhood stimulation: A 20-year follow-up to an experimental intervention in Jamaica.* National Bureau of Economic Research. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from http://www.nber.org/papers/w19185.pdf

Grantham-McGregor, S. M., Powell, C. A., Walker, S. P., & Hime, J. H. (1991). Nutritional supplmentation, psychosocial stimulation, and mental development of stunted children: The Jamaican study. *The Lancet, 338*(8758), 1-5.

Greenberg, M. T., Weissburg, R. P., Utne O'Brian, M., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M. J. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. *American Psychologist, 58*, 466-474.

Harrington, N. G., Giles, S. M., Hoyle, R. H., Feeney, G. J., & Yungbluth, S. C. (2001). Evaluation of the All Stars character education and problem behavior prevention program: Effects on mediator and outcome variable for middle school students. *Health Education & Behavior, 28*, 533-546.

Heckman, J. J., & Kautz, T. (n.d.). *Fostering and measuring skills: Interventions that improve character and cognition.* Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

January, A. M., Casey, R. J., & Paulson, D. (2011). A meta-analysis of classroom-wide interventions to build social skills: Do they work? *School Psychology Review, 20*(2), 242-256.

Kagan, S. (2001). Teaching for character and community. *Educational Leadership, 59*(2), 50-55.

Kitzman, H., Olds, D. L., Cole, R., Hanks, C., Anson, E., Arcoleo, K., . . . Holmberg, J. (2010). Enduring effects of a prenatal and infancy home visiting program by nurses on children: Follow-up of a randomized trial among children at age 12 years. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 164*(5), 412-418.

Levine, M. (2012). *Teach your children well: Parenting for authentic success.* New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Lewis, K. M., Bavarian, N., Snyder, F. J., Acock, A., Day, J., DuBois, D. L., . . . Flay, B. R. (2012). Direct and mediated effects of a social-emotional character development program on adolescent substance use. *International Journal of Emotional Education, 4*(1), 56-78.

Lickona, T. (1993). The return of character education. *Educational Leadership, 51*, 6-11.

Lynch, K. B., Geller, S. R., & Schmidt, M. G. (2004). Multi-year evaluation of the effectiveness of a resilience-based prevention program for young children. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 24*(3), 335-353.

McNamara, K. (2000). Outcomes associated with service involvement among disengaged youth. *Journal of Drug Education, 30*(2), 229-245.

McNeal, R. B., Hansen, W. B., Harrington, N. G., & Giles, S. M. (2004). How All Stars works: An examination of program effects on mediating variables. *Health Education & Behavior, 31*, 165-178.

National Repository for Evidence-Based Programs and Practices. (2013, January 13). *About NREPP.* Retrieved 2014, from http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/AboutNREPP.aspx

Olds, D. L., Kitzman, H., Cole, R., Robinson, J., Sidora, K., Luckey, D. W., . . . Holmberg, J. (2004). Effects of nurse home-visiting on maternal life course and child development: Age 6 follow-up results of a randomized trial. *Pediatrics, 6*, 1550-1559.

Reese, W. J. (2007). *History, education, and the schools.* New York,, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Reyes, M. R., Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., Elbertson, N. A., & Salovey, P. (2012). The interaction effects of program training, dosage, and implementation quality on targeted outcomes for the RULER approach to social and emotional learning. *School Psychology Review, 41*(1), 82-99.

Riggs, N. R., Greenberg, M. T., Kusche, C. A., & Pentz, M. A. (2006). The mediational role of neurocognition in the behavioral outcomes of a social-emotional prevention program in elementary school students: Effects of the PATH curriculum. *Prevention Science, 7*(1), 91-102.

Rivers, S. E., Brackett, M. A., Reyes, M. R., & Elbertson, N. A. (2013). Improving the social and emotional climate of classrooms: A clustered randomized control trial testing the RULER approach. *Prevention Science, 14*, 77-87.

Scales, P. C., Blyth, D. A., Berkas, T. H., & Keilsmeier, J. (2001). The effects of service-learning on middle school students' social responsibility and academic success. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 20*, 332-358.

Schaps, E., & Williams, E. (1999). *Character education: The foundation for teacher education.* National Commission on Character Education. Washington, D.C.: Character Education Partnership.

Social and Character Development Research Consortium. (2011). *Efficacy of schoolwide programs to promote social and character development and reduce problem behavior in elementary school children.* Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Alexandria, VA: National Center for Education Research. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncer/pubs/20112001/pdf/20112001.pdf

Sojourner, R. J. (2012). *The rebirth and retooling of character education in America.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Research Foundation.

Tough, P. (2012). *How children succeed: Grit, curiosity, and the hidden power of character.* New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.

Tuttle, C. C., Gill, B., Gleason, P., Knetchel, V., Nichols-Barrer, I., & Resch, A. (2013). *KIPP middle schools: Impacts on achievement and other outcomes.* Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.

Washburn, I. J., Acock, A., Vuchinich, S., Snyder, F., Li, K., Ji, P., . . . Flay, B. R. (2011). Effects of a social-emotional and character development program on the trajectory of behaviors associated with social-emotional character development: Findings from three randomized trials. *Prevention Science, 12*(3), 314-323.

Watz, M. (2011). An historical analysis of character education. *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education, 12*, 34-53.

Weissbourd, R. (2009). *The parents we mean to be: How well intentioned adults undermine children's moral and emotional development.* New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.

Williams, M. M. (2000). Models of character education: Perspectives and developmental issues. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education, and Development, 39*(1), 32-40.

Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. (2014, January 13). Retrieved from RULER: How RULER becomes an integral and enduring part of your school district: http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/ruler-overview/

Yeager, J. M., Fisher, S. W., & Shearon, D. N. (2011). *Smart strengths: Building character, resilience, and relationships in youth.* Putnmam Valley, NY: Kravis Publishing.